THE M-U-S-T MIX STRATEGY FOR BRANDED MOBILE APPLICATIONS

Abstract

Mobile apps development has brought challenges and opportunities for companies to market their brands and products through a new channel. This research identifies the strategies which should be considered by companies in branded apps design. We illustrate five business objectives: communication, customer relationship management, sales, product innovation and marketing research. A M-U-S-T Mix method is proposed to specify how mobile features (M), use of brand mention elements (U), social features (S) and type of applications elements (T) should be used to develop branded apps. The types of branded apps are classified as tool-centric, game-centric, social-centric, m-commerce-centric and design-centric apps. Extensive examples of branded apps are given to illustrate the best practice of these strategies.

Keywords: Mobile applications, Branded apps, Social, Design, Marketing, Strategy, Mobile business.
Introduction

Mobile phone application development has become very important to companies, with most of them actively engaged in implementing mobile strategies, developing or actively deploying portfolios of mobile phone applications. Hinchcliffe (2013) predicts that the fusion of mobile will continue to be a major challenge and the branded mobile phone applications (branded apps) will make significant progress in the following years. Companies have to adapt to this new culture, with new marketers’ profiles and competences facing new consumers’ behaviors on the market.

The concept of branded apps is defined by Bellman et al (2011) as software downloadable to a mobile device which prominently displays a brand identity, often via the name of the app and the appearance of a brand logo or icon, throughout the user experience. One reason for the popularity of branded apps as a marketing device is that the high level of user engagement makes the advertising messages conveyed by those apps highly persuasive (Calder, Malthouse and Schaedel, 2009).

Research has been done to test the actual impact of branded apps on users. Bellman et al. (2011) utilize an experimental design to confirm that the use of branded apps has a positive persuasive impact increasing interest in the brand. Some research has been conducted to measure user adoption and responsiveness of mobile apps. Due to the fact that mobile apps focus on real-time relationships with consumers, the relationship management is more consumer-instant-action-centric than conversation-centric. One challenge for companies is how to capture users’ attention. A difference between mobile and web services pointed by Oinas-Kukkonen and Kurkela (2003) is the usage context. People often use mobile in a noisy and distracting environment. However, real time contextual information including peer to peer information and recommendation is source of new consumer behaviors on markets. Kourouthanassis et al (2010) identified expected performance as a significant determinant in the acceptance of mobile marketing offers. Hu and Syu (2010) find that the main motives and sought-after rewards in using mobile apps are entertainment, functionality, information, socialization, intellectual stimulation, following a trend, and learning. However, to date, no research has been done on the identification of the features which can be used by companies developing their branded apps strategies.

The goal of our research is to provide marketers a method of branded apps strategy on this fast-growing trend. Our contributions are three-fold:

1. We illustrate the business objectives of branded apps into five categories: communication, customer relationship management (CRM), sales, open innovation and marketing research.
2. By analyzing and evaluating mobile apps designed by top 100 brands (selected by Interbrand annual report), we propose a M-U-S-T Mix strategy to identify what factors should be taken into account in designing branded apps, precisely:
   a. We describe mobile (M) features, use of brand mention (U) features, and social (S) features in detail, and further illustrate how these features should be integrated in branded apps.
   b. We classify five types (T) of branded apps: tool-centric, game-centric, social-centric, m-commerce-centric and design-centric.
3. Extensive examples of branded apps are given to illustrate the best practice of these features.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. We first specify the business objectives of branded apps, we then illustrate the M-U-S-T Mix strategy in branded apps design with examples. Finally, we conclude with directions for future research.

1 Business Objectives of Branded Apps

When brands decide to create mobile apps, they first have to come out with clear business goals. In this section we present five business objectives of branded apps. As shown in Figure 1, the goals are: communication, customer relationship management (CRM), sales, product innovation and marketing
research. Note that one branded app can contain one or more business objectives. Also, one brand can design more than one mobile apps targeting different products and business goals.

**Figure 1.** Five main business objectives in branded apps design.

The first goal is communication. This goal includes communicating brand values, information and products, increasing brand image and brand awareness. Most branded apps target this goal. Tool-centric apps inform user how to use the brand products; game-centric apps aim to create an immerse environment with the use of different brand mentions, exposure to brand good moment; design-centric apps communicate sense of creativity, which adds great value to their brand image.

The second business goal in branded apps design is CRM, to manage a company’s interactions with current and future customers. It includes brand engagement with loyal customers, user data collection, and product recommendation to current and potential clients. Branded apps can well perform as a middleware between brands and customers. Tool-centric apps recommend products to branded apps users; game-centric apps foster brand engagement, and at the same time collect user data; social-centric apps build a community for the engagement of loyal customers, the sharing function allows customers to communicate a positive image of the brands to their social circles.

The third goal of designing branded apps is sales. Branded m-commerce-centric apps try to make a complete new purchasing experience and interaction models for users, with a whole set of capabilities including location awareness, context sensing, and the ability to customize products.

The fourth goal is product innovation. Branded apps can support open innovation by consumers. Social-centric apps allow users to generate new ideas with products; a community is built for idea sharing and idea rating, the most rated idea is often awarded by the brands.

The last goal is marketing research. Branded apps can help companies to make user surveys in new ways. In the shampoo market, for instance, some companies have asked women to take and share photos with their mobiles to express what good/bad hair appearance is for them. This process provides added value information for marketers to better understand consumer behaviors.

### 2 M-U-S-T Mix Strategy

In this section, we propose a M-U-S-T Mix strategy (Figure 2), which stands for Mobile, Use-of-Brand-Mention, Social, and Type-of-App. This Mix refers to the most important four features in branded apps design. In each category, we further specify a set of elements in details which can be used to design branded apps.
2.1 M: Mobile

The first dimension of the strategy is Mobile. It’s important for a company to know what the up-to-date mobile features are utilized in branded apps. We classify them in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobile feature</th>
<th>How it is used in branded apps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Camera</td>
<td>Allows users to snap or scan, and gives marketing strategists the possibility to encourage users to take photos of branded products to share with friends, or to scan barcodes/QR-codes of products to get brand/product information or gain credits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location sensor</td>
<td>Location awareness has been widely used in branded apps, providing users with a stream of information based on their location and interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice sensor</td>
<td>Allows mobile to recognize the human voice and has been used in CRM to answer questions from clients by direct speaking.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touch sensor</td>
<td>The technology of various mobile sensors creates rich interaction between end users and mobile devices, allowing users to carry out single and multi-touch gestures like sway, shake, swipe, etc. These gestures have been widely used in game-centric apps.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tilt sensor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proximity sensor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Augmented reality (AR)</td>
<td>The technology combines virtual data into the physical real world, allowing users to perceive virtual product in the real environment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual mirror</td>
<td>A virtual mirror adjusts geometrically to reflect the viewers image in real time. This feature is used by cosmetic and apparel related branded apps to allow consumers to check how branded products really look on them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile video</td>
<td>Short and smart mobile advertising videos are used to attract people’s attention, and the viral video contents can be shared through mobile social networks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile payment</td>
<td>Mobile payment allows users to pay for a product directly from their mobile device, anytime and everywhere.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Mobile features used in branded apps.

All the above features have been used in current branded apps. For example, L’Oreal “The color genius” app (Figure 3) uses camera feature to ask users to take a picture of their current outfits and then proposes them the right matching make-up products. “My L’Oreal Mirror” is a CRM app which utilizes the voice sensor to allow the real voice communications between users and apps. “IKEA Catalog” app implements the augmented reality mobile technique and allows users to place selected furniture from the catalog in their own room. “Adidas eyewear” app (Figure 12) supports virtual mirror technique and allows users to virtually try on glasses. Starbucks developed Square Wallet, a mobile payment app that was launched in November 2012. Due to the convenience factor of Square Wallet, to date, mobile payments have been implemented in over 11,000 Starbucks stores nationwide.
2.2 U: Use-of-Brand-Mention

Use of brand mention indicates how companies market their brands inside apps. Note that brands can be divided into corporate brand and product brand: for example the yogurt brand Activia belongs to the DANONE group, so the corporate brand is DANONE while the product brand is Activia. We classify nine brand mention elements which are used in branded apps. Four elements are related to corporate brand and five elements are related to product brand, as shown in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Use of brand mention element</th>
<th>Corporate brand</th>
<th>Product brand</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Corporate brand name</td>
<td>Product brand name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate brand logo</td>
<td>Product brand logo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate brand color matching</td>
<td>Product brand packaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate brand mascot</td>
<td>Product brand color matching</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Product brand mascot</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Brand mention used in branded apps.

From these brand mention elements, corporate brand name/logo and product brand/logo appear on most branded apps. It worth mentioning that product brand packaging element often appears on tool-centric apps as product recommendation (example can be seen in Heinz “Food in a Minute” app in Figure 5) and on game-centric apps as object for players to play around (for example: “Domino’s Pizza Hero” app in Figure 7). Also, product brand mascot element is often used in games-centric apps to be set as avatars for players (for example: Kellogg “Apple Jacks™ Race to the Bowl Rally” in Figure 8). Moreover, some branded apps use the same color scheme as the brand logo color, which is considered as an added value to brand communication.

2.3 S: Social

Social media provides new opportunities for businesses to engage and interact with potential users, encourage an increased sense of intimacy with users, and build all-important relationships with potential users. Hinchcliffe (2013) predicts that social networking features will be noticeably added into traditional branded apps that allow improved collaboration and sharing. Extensive studies have been conducted on the relationship between social interaction and users’ online shopping behaviors. Christodoulides and Michaelidou (2011) show that social interaction positively impacts on e-satisfaction and e-loyalty and is a key variable of e-commerce. Olbrich and Holsing (2011) show the positive impact of social functionalities on shopping behavior. Shin and Shin (2011) show that social presence is a key element of buying on online web sites, reinforcing security and confidence. Wang et al (2012) investigate consumption-related peer communication through social media and its impacts on users’ product attitudes and purchase intentions.

From the perspective of user involvement, we classify the social features into three categories in Table 3, which are user generated content (UGC), social annotation and social networking. Concerning UGC, research has shown that mobile apps are more focused on shared content types such as photos and videos than texts. Most branded apps integrate social sharing feature, allowing the contents/applications to be shared to external social networks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social feature</th>
<th>User generated content(UGC)</th>
<th>Social annotation</th>
<th>Social networking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>text/photo/video/voice/location</td>
<td>like/rate/comment/tag</td>
<td>online chat follow/unfollow people share to emails invite from external social networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Social features used in branded apps.

2.4 T: Type-of-App

The last strategy which should be considered by companies is the type of branded apps. Bellman et al (2011) differentiate two types of apps: informational app and game-like app. After reviewing the branded apps designed by top 100 brands, we propose a classification of five dimensions to identify branded apps: tool-centric, game-centric, social-centric, m-commerce-centric and design-centric. We further illustrate each type of apps with extensive examples.

2.4.1 Tool-centric apps

Most companies develop their apps as tools for users, which provide utilitarian effects for consumers. The diversity of tool-centric apps is huge. The main ideas behind tool-centric apps are to find out motivations and requirements of consumers in using/buying their products, and to develop tool services to assist consumers in this process. For example, L’Oreal “The color genius” app (Figure 3) allows users to take a photo of their outfits and to select a look as day or night, the app then proposes an on-trend combination of make-up products which suits the users’ outfits. “Colgate dental advisor” app (Figure 4) implements toothbrush timer to teach recommended brushing techniques and allows users to set reminders for next dental appointment. Heinz “Food in a Minute” app (Figure 5) provides 700 recipes which allow users to search by ingredients or names. Each recipe contains one or more Heinz food products as references for users. “Johnson & Johnson wound care resource™” app (Figure 6) provides a series of tools to make wound care easier, it allows users to write wound diary to track the progress of wounds, and it recommends users a set of wound care products based on type, location and condition of the wound.

Figure 3. L'Oreal “The color genius” app. Figure 4. Colgate dental advisor app.
Most tool-centric apps present their products in direct or indirect ways. “The color genius” app, “Food in a Minute” app and “Johnson & Johnson wound care resource™” app present their products as recommendations to consumers, which are considered as indirect customer relationship management; while “Colgate dental advisor” app lists their products with detailed classification and descriptions, which is considered as a direct communication.

Depending on different business objectives, companies choose to use various mobile and brand mention features. Most tool-centric apps allow sharing app services or products to external social networks.

2.4.2 Game-centric apps

Game-centric apps are largely designed in companies due to their high hedonic values. For example, “Domino’s Pizza Hero” app (Figure 7) provides an immersing game experience by making a top quality virtual pizza by kneading dough, spreading sauce, sprinkling cheese, placing toppings as racing against the clock; Johnson & Johnson “Happy nurse” app is a race game avoiding all obstacles in the path. In this path J & J posters appear and the nurse has to use hand sanitizer at the last moment to enter the operating room. Heinz “Dip & Squeeze ™ Ketchup Craze” app contains 10 game levels which allows players to squeeze Ketchup on different kinds of food (sausages, burgers, etc); Kellogg’s “Apple Jacks™ Race to the Bowl Rally” app (Figure 8) allows players to create avatar by choosing Apple Jacks mascots and to race through the frozen Ice Kingdom. Users get an extra race points by collecting Apple Jacks cereal pieces and achieve hyper-speed by collecting Apple Jacks logos along the route.
Concerning mobile features, most game-centric apps implement multi-touch gestures like sway, shake and swipe.

Concerning use of brand mention features, most game-centric apps are designed according to their products, thus the product packaging and product mascots are often used within branded apps. Some game-centric apps use the same color scheme as the product brand color scheme.

Concerning social features, most game-centric apps allow sharing achievements and scores on famous social networks like Facebook and Twitter.

Concerning business objective, most game-centric apps may aim to increase the brand image and awareness, some apps which are linked to e-commerce websites aim to direct sales. Moreover, companies can collect user data through game-centric apps, which is useful for CRM.

### 2.4.3 Social-centric apps

Social-centric apps are designed to target the purpose of socializing for fun. One successful example is UNIQLOOKS app designed by Japanese apparel retailer UNIQLO (Figure 9). This app affords customers, fans and visitors the opportunity to populate the global community with images of themselves wearing the UNIQLO cloth in varying combinations, whereby members of UNIQLOOKS can vote and comment on their styling. A global audience determines each “Look of the Week” winner, and as a reward the look is featured on the front page of the UNIQLO’s Facebook page. The top-ranked photo is used to help the clothing showcase in stores. The Likes spread the brand across social networks in a natural, peer-to-peer manner, while the site has a strong e-commerce element by linking directly through to the UNIQLO online store. Commented by Vazquez (2011), UNIQLOOKS is not only about online advertising and user-generated content, it seeks to engage fans and brand advocates by making their community both their models and their stylists.
Other examples of social-centric apps: Avon “send a kiss” app (Figure 10) allows users to take a picture of their lip shapes, to create personalized messages with their lip prints, and to share the kisses to friends and family via Email, Facebook and Twitter. Similarly, Dove “body language messenger” app (Figure 11) allows users to type a message, to watch the Dove girls use their bodies to create each letter, and to share this animated message with friends via email, SMS and social networks. These two social-centric apps aim at sharing customized messages but they do not create a community as UNIQLOOKS app does.

Social-centric apps utilize social features like user-generated content, social rating, commenting, and sharing. Camera features are largely used in social-centric apps because contents that users generated in branded apps are more usually photos than texts.

2.4.4 M-commerce-centric apps

In m-commerce-centric apps, the features to personalize consumers and to customize products are the keys to achieve sales objective. For example, “IKEA Catalog” app implements the augmented reality mobile technique and allows users to place selected furniture from the catalog in their own room. “Adidas eyewear” app (Figure 12) supports users by creating personalized glasses and allows users to virtually try them on; it also allows users to search for nearest Adidas stores. Abercrombie & Fitch “Hollister So Cal Style” (Figure 13) app recommends cloth styles by asking users to answer a short quiz, and allows user to search styles by colors. Moreover, once users scan one cloth barcode, it will display complete customized looks with style tips.
2.4.5 Design centric apps

Some brands develop their apps as creative and imaginative design-centric apps.

“CAMPER Weather. Have a Camper day!” is an app (Figure 14) that helps to put a smile on your face regardless of whether it's sunny or cloudy outside. As mentioned by the company, “This weather app is how Camper, the shoe brand, understands optimism: half imagination, half craft. To communicate this concept in a friendly, different and non-intrusive manner, we decided to take a new look at some of the things that are currently set in stone. The way we view weather forecasts today (with boring, lifeless interfaces and icons) was a great starting point for us and seemed like the perfect tool for illustrating the philosophy behind the concept. As a result, we created new meteorological elements made from prêt-a-porter materials and turned them into musical instruments that react to touch.”

“Camper is not a specific shoe, but rather a style, a philosophy of life, a way of thinking and a way of making shoes. Camper is more than a company and more than a business. It’s a team of people driven by creativity”.

![Figure 14. CAMPER Weather. Have a Camper day! app.](image)

Nike “MAKING” app (Figure 15) is an easy-to-use reference guide to compare the impacts of materials, which is a tool to inspire designers and creators to make better choices in the materials they use. According to Nike, “We know that every decision a designer makes in the product creation process has an impact on the environment. But given the range of options that exist, making informed choices can be a challenge. That is why MAKING matters.”
Note that brands often design more than one branded apps. Most apps focus on different products or business objectives, thus they tend to develop different types of apps. For example, Heinz has developed “Food in a minute” tool-centric app and “Dip & Squeeze ™ Ketchup Craze” game-centric app. Johnson & Johnson has developed “J & J wound care resource™” tool-centric app and “Happy nurse” game-centric app.

Brands can also implement a series of apps connected one to another. Nestle has designed a series of apps for children named “StimuLearn”, containing one game-centric app “Make a Match” and two tool-centric app “Watch Me Go!” and “Storytime Duet” to teach kids important values and educate them about healthy behaviors.

3 Conclusion and Future Work

Our research has provided a method to marketers on how to think and execute business strategies in branded apps design. This research has illustrated the business objective in terms of five perspectives (communication, CRM, sales, product innovation, and marketing research). We have proposed a M-U-S-T Mix strategy to precisely indentify how mobile features, use of brand mention elements, social features and type of apps are utilized in the apps. We also conclude that the current branded apps are far away from being perfect, and most of the above features are not yet well considered in existing apps design.

Concerning the future research subjects, the user acceptance factors of branded apps need to be further studied to guide the marketers how to build the apps which could be positively received and accepted by customers.

References


